



Source: Steven Erlanger, 'Attack to continue until Hezbollah is neutralized, Israel says', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 15/07/06.

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"I know we drove it in two days then, but there were only two of us and we were young. Now there are three kids. We're pitching the tent before dark each day, this time. That'll take five days. Sydney to Cairns in five days, that's reasonable," Mimi had said.

Gary had just glowered at her. 'You've got no sense of adventure,' he countered. 'I've put months into trying to get that venture capital, but we heard today that the suits are not forthcoming. Now I can't wait to get on the road.'

'Forthcoming,' she muttered. 'And they're not 'suits', they're people who weigh up risks. Anyway, forget that venture, I'm trying to get packed so we can get away. This is your idea of an adventure, not mine. And when we get there you'll be hoping your parents will invite us to stay on that god-forsaken cattle station. Oh why can't you consider the children! The north is no place for them.' She threw woolly jumpers in the case because the baby was shivering, and mustered them all into the car.

They pitched the tent in a 'riverbed' just out of Barcaldine on the third day; underfoot was dry gritty sand. They were surrounded by silence and the grey gnarled spindly eucalypts of outback Queensland. Wearing T shirts now, they moved through the measured rhythms much as she imagined her 'pioneer' forebears would have.

'Bring the bucket, son. Now we dig like this.' Gary dug scoops of the grey sand with his bare hands 'see, it's quite wet already. Now push the bucket into the sand, and watch while it fills with water.' Mimi secretly thrilled at the sight of clear water filling the bucket under the dry sand.

'Oooh, wadda' Ben's blonde head bent over the sand, his little hands scooping in imitation of his father's.

'Come on you two, you'll have to finish putting the tent up!' She had gathered enough dry branches to make a fire. She heaped up some leaves, stacked the little twigs over them, laid thicker branches in a circular pattern over them, put a match to the leaves. Sausages in the frypan sizzled. Soon a billy-can over smouldering embers would give her a cup of hot tea. Silky warm air caressed her skin. With face upturned she stared at the stars, bright holes in a huge black cloth. They never looked like that in Sydney.

Gary put his arm around her, but she winced when he said, 'This is quite an adventure, isn't it.'

She looked steadily at him. 'Thanks for stopping before dark today. It makes all the difference you know.'

'It's sure different to Sydney, eh?' He was up north already, she thought.

'Different from,' she said.

By the fourth day, it seemed the red dirt road would go on forever. She thought she could see the round shape of the horizon. We're a ship in the desert, she thought. Did Leichhardt sit on a camel and think that, before he perished up here?

Gary had kept Megan sitting between them for the past four or five hours. 'Daddy, the speedo is way over 120, are you driving too fast?'

'That's the good thing out here, Megan, there's no cops, it doesn't matter.'

Mimi ventured, 'Daddy should explain to you, Megan, there's a reason for laws. Speed limits are there to protect us, and it isn't sensible to break the law, whether there are police around or not.'

He glared menacingly at her over Megan's head. She looked down at her knitting, one plain one purl. He talked on at the six-year-old as if she were his mother. 'When we move up here and live on the property with grandma.... " or 'When I was a boy out mustering...' or '..... mummy often cries just like lots of ladies, you'll find that out when you grow up to be a big girl...' She flashed her knitting needles.

'It's getting dark. Can we find a place to camp?' she asked quietly.

And an hour later, 'It's dark. When are you bloody well going to stop?' She knew now that he would only stop if she yelled and clattered the pots, or if some catastrophe happened. 'Why can't you stop when I ask you. Why do you have to be so pig-headed.'

But it was the fifth evening on the road out of Hughenden when the catastrophe happened. She saw the cow before he did, saw it staring into the headlights. Heard tyres screeching, felt herself lunging into the windscreen. Crunch. Thud. The noise which goes on for ever. The cow was dead, front of the car scrunched in, children screaming. 'Mummy, Daddy was driving too fast!'

'Shut up, we're all okay. The car still goes. We'll be in Mt Garnet in no time. You've got to toughen up when you come up north,' he glared at them all, gripping the steering wheel still.

'Oh here we go, we're all tough North of the Brisbane Line, eh? No more pianos or artwork, just get in the saddle and make sure you stay dirty, eh?' She had a sense of foreboding about the next three weeks. 'One person's adventure is another person's idiotic fiasco, if you ask me!'

'Nobody asked you.' His eyes narrowed. 'You just don't understand adventurism, you people from the south haven't lived tough. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, that's my motto.'

She didn't care that the baby was crying, Ben and Megan terrified. 'You don't even know what adventurism is, you idiot! As if bringing these children up north is just a business risk! You're just like all those old men who take us into wars with all that idiotic rhetoric, you confuse people's lives with starting up a business, get thousands of people killed because they're just pawns to risk in a political game!'

She was sobbing hysterically now. He was laughing. They drove on to the station, and as she had expected, no-one was there.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Marion White.